CLOVEN-HOOFED

BIG GAME ANIMALS OF ALBERTA

DEPARTMENT OF

LANDS AND FORESTS

CLOVEN-HOOFED BIG GAME ANIMALS OF ALBERTA

CERVIDAE:

1. Mule Deer
2. White-tailed Deer
3. Elk (Wapiti)
4. Moose
5. Caribou

ANTILOCAPRIDAE:

Antelope

BOVIDAE:

1. Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep
2. Mountain Goat

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INTRODUCTION

The cloven-hoofed animals of Alberta include three zoological families. These are the deers (Cervidae), the pronghorns (Antilocapridae), and the sheep and goats (Bovidae).

The deer family is the largest and most important. All the members grow antlers. These are bony outgrowths of the skull which are shed each year and grow anew. The antlers begin growth in the spring and reach full size in late spring or early summer. During growth they are covered with skin, "the velvet", which carries nourishment to the growing bone. The "velvet" dries and is shed when the growth is complete. Both sexes are capable of growing antlers, though in four of the five members of the deer family those of the female usually do not develop at all. When antlers grow on females they are always small. Though the number of antler points does not necessarily correspond to the animal's age, the antlers of the male grow larger each year until he is past his prime. As old age lightens and shrinks his body, the antlers become smaller, and usually mishapen. The males shed their antlers after the breeding season, in mid- or late winter. The caribou females retain their antlers longer than the males.

The second characteristic feature of the deer family worth noting is the scent gland, often called the metatarsal gland. This is a long, hair-bordered slit on the inside of the lower end of each hind leg.

The sheep and goats are in the same family as are domestic sheep and cattle. They are smaller than the deers and possess horns instead of antlers. The "horn" consists of a solid bony core growing out of the skull over which is a sheath of true horn that grows from the skin of the head. Horns are never shed and continue to grow as long as the animal lives.

Both sexes grow horns, but in sheep, those of the males are much larger. In the male sheep the friction between the bony core and the horny sheath, created as the

sheath grows and slides over the core, produced wrinkles in the horn. The wrinkle pattern makes it possible to determine the ages of the animals.

The sheep also have scent glands. These are conspicuous pits in the head near the bases of the horns.

The pronghorns are more or less intermediate between deer and sheep. The horns are like those of sheep but the horny sheath is shed each year like the antlers of deer.

The members of all three families are ruminants; that is, they eat grass and low herbs (graze), or bushes, twigs and leaves (browse), which they swallow unchewed. The coarser portions are later returned to the mouth and chewed (chewing the cud) while the animals are resting. A characteristic of all ruminants is that they lack upper front teeth, and instead, have a tough pad against which the lower front teeth clamp.

The feet of all are similar. Each foot ends in two large hoofs which bear the animal's weight. Behind these, and higher up the foot, are two very small hoof-like knobs which only leave a print when the ground is very soft.

This group of animals has been valued by man since prehistoric times. Today they are sought by hunters, photographers and nature-lovers for their value as food, trophy and sheer beauty of form.

G Miller

MULE DEER

Description:

The flanks are colored grey to brownish-grey with lighter underbody. The forehead is dark, the "chin" and throat are white, the rump patch white and the tail grey to white with a black tip. The ears are large and prominent. Antlers appear normally on males only, rarely on females. The antlers develop in a double fork series branching from two main beams.

Range:

Mule deer are found throughout Alberta, though scarce in the northeastern sector. They concentrate in regions having brushy cover and the food of their choice. They are plentiful in the brushy western regions of the Province.

Food:

Food consists of browse and some grasses and herbs. Browse consists of tree foliage, twigs and small boughs of aspen, willow and other plants.

Reproduction:

Mating takes place each year in late autumn. Males are usually polygamous. Fawns are born in the spring (May and June). The number of fawns born relates directly to the quality of the range. The common occurrence in Alberta is a single birth, though twins are born where good range exists.

Special Distinguishing Features:

The mule deer's running gait is a series of stiff-legged bounds or jumps. The tail is generally held down even while running. The antlers are distinctive: in the white-tailed deer and elk the antlers consist of two main beams having smaller branches or tines sprouting from each. In the mule deer the main beam of each antler extends from the skull, then divides into two beams, and these in turn divide into four, and so on depending on the condition and age of the animal. The prominent ears are responsible for the mule deer's name.

g miller

WHITE-TAILED DEER

Description:

The white-tailed deer is usually smaller than mule deer of the same age. The upper body is colored grey to reddish brown, while the underbody, insides of legs and underside of tail are white. The somewhat bushy tail is grey to brown on top; however, it is often held erect and flared, particularly when the animal is alerted - hence the name. Normally only males grow antlers, though occasionally a female with small antlers is found. Antlers are projected upward and outward from head, then sweep forward. Individual tines grow from the two main beams. Fawns are dappled or spotted.

Range:

The range of the white-tailed deer in Alberta has been limited but is extending rapidly each year, particularly along main waterways. The heaviest concentrations occur in the eastern regions of the Province with only occasional specimens reported from the foothill areas. Range requirements roughly approximate those for mule deer, namely, brushy sheltered glades and valleys.

Food:

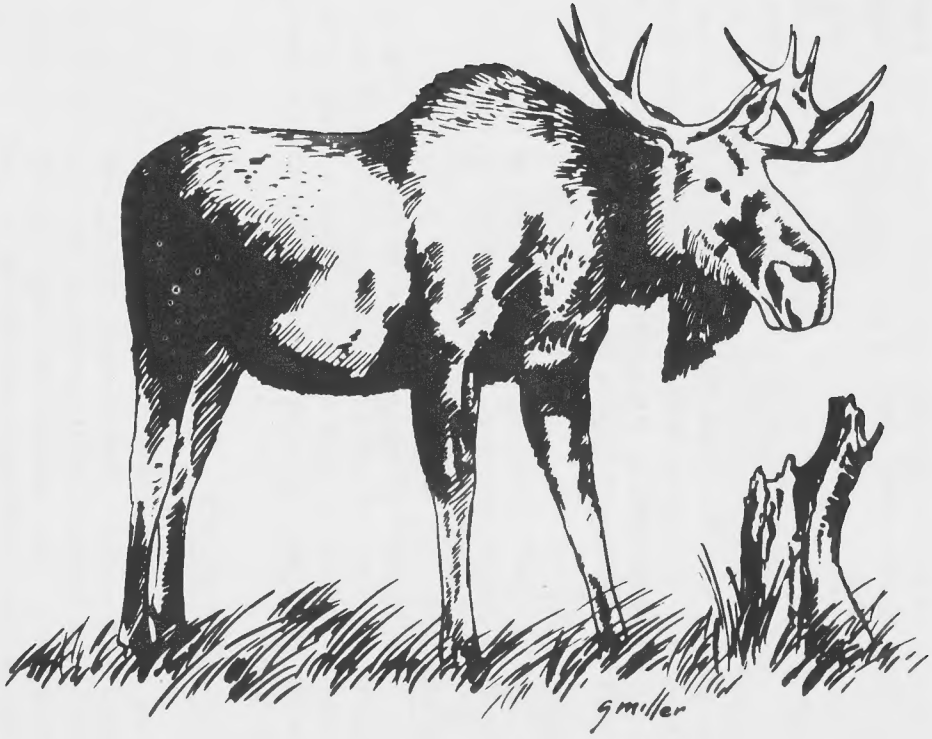
The food of the white-tailed deer is similar to that of the mule deer and consists of browse with some grasses and herbs.

Reproduction:

Mating takes place each year in autumn. Males are usually polygamous, but the extent of polygamy depends upon the ratio of males to females. Fawns are born in the spring. The occurrence of twins is more common among white-tailed deer than among mule deer.

Special Distinguishing Features:

The running gait of the white-tailed deer is featured by a series of short dashes, punctuated by bounds or leaps at fairly regular intervals. The upward thrust and fanned-out display of the tail is a characteristic gesture, particularly when the animal is disturbed. The white-tailed deer readily occupies areas bordering on farm buildings and cultivated land. It is a cunning and wary animal but more adaptable than the mule deer to conditions changed by man.


g miller

MOOSE

Description:

The moose is the largest member of the deer family. It is black in color, often blending to brown or grey tones on legs, belly and head. A pendant of skin hangs from the throat, usually referred to as a 'bell'. A large protuberant snout terminating in a broad inflated muzzle provides the moose with a solemn or doleful appearance. The antlers are normally present on male moose only. These are two flat, slightly concave, plates of bone with notched borders, often spikes. The antlers spread sideways and backward from the head.

Range:

The moose ranges throughout the forested areas of Alberta, particularly the muskeg and wet-land regions of the north and west.

Food:

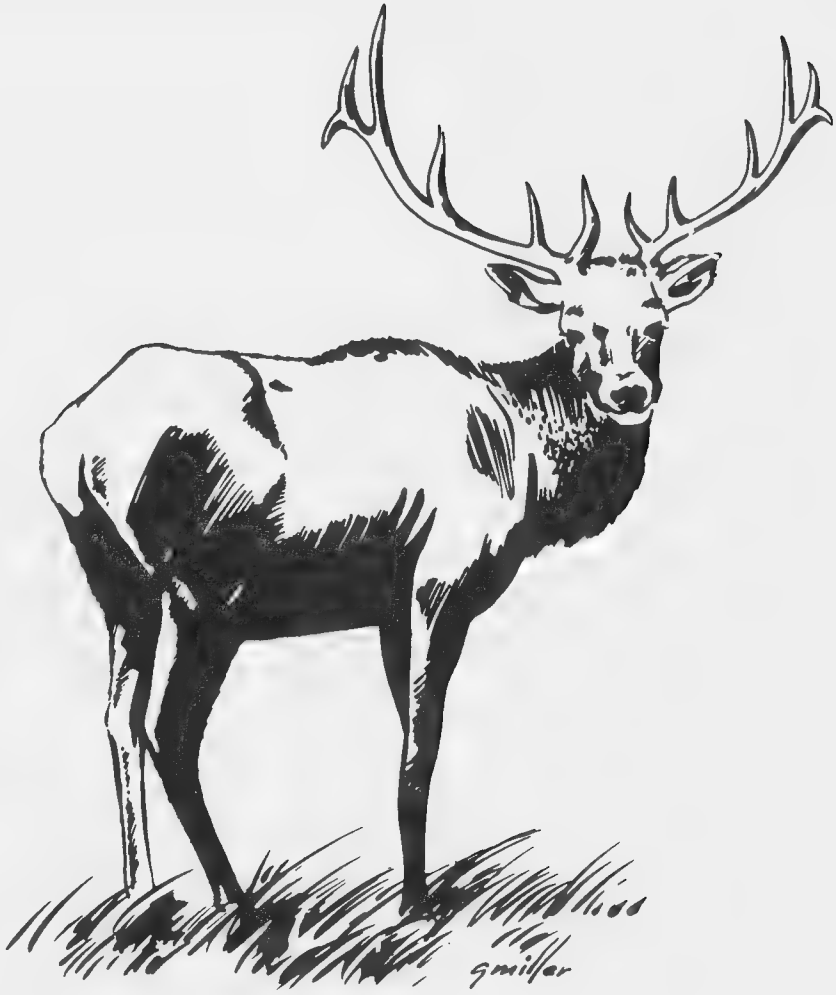
The food of moose is composed largely of browse and bark. Aquatic plants are eaten in the summer.

Reproduction:

The moose mates in autumn and polygamy in male moose is limited. The calves are born in the spring, normally single birth but twins are common on excellent ranges. The calves are dark brown to black.

Special Distinguishing Features:

The most inexperienced observer would find it difficult to mistake the large, black, heavy-shouldered, stolid looking moose. In summer it often may be seen standing in water with its head completely immersed as it crops aquatic plants from a lake bottom. The moose may measure over six feet from ground to shoulder. The moose's gait is a long-paced swinging lope by which it moves with deceptive speed. Both sexes bellow during the mating season.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ELK

Description:

The elk is larger than the mule deer. The coat changes color from summer to winter as in most deer, but buckskin colored sides and back with darker legs, head and neck is the general pattern. The male elk possesses a dark furred mane on the neck. The rump patch is white and surrounds a compact stubby tail unmarked. Antlers normally appear on males only. These are composed of two backward and upward sweeping main beams from which individual tines develop, generally upward. The antlers often grow very large.

Range:

The elk range in Alberta extends along the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains and adjacent foothills from the United States border north to the Smoky and Wapiti Rivers. Small herds have been sponsored by introduction of elk to areas in the Athabasca - St. Paul - Bonnyville districts.

Food:

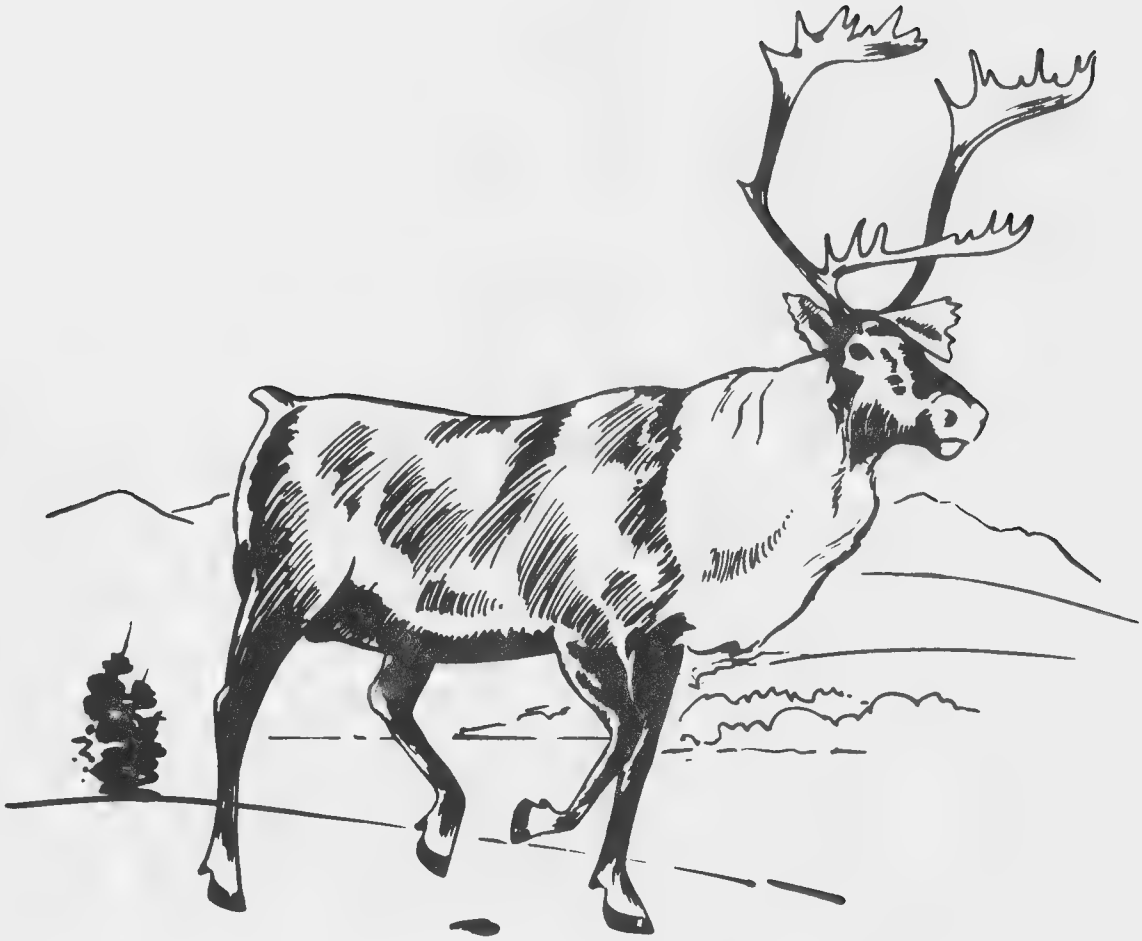
Grasses, herbs, twigs and bark form the bulk of the elk diet. Grass is a sustaining food and elk migrate regularly between summer and winter ranges in search of suitable grazing. The late autumn movement is designed to avoid the deep snow of high plateaus and alpine meadows. Winter is often spent in the more productive pastures of foothill valleys. A return to higher land is made in the spring.

Reproduction:

Mating commences in early autumn each year. Bull elk are polygamous and gather herds of cow elk to create breeding "harems". There is fairly constant competition among bulls during the mating period. The calves are born in the spring, usually one, occasionally two. Calves are mottled.

Special Distinguishing Features:

The elk is a majestic buckskinned animal and the wariest of the deer family. The male is not often sighted except when winter's hunger forces it into occupied land, for the summer range is removed from areas travelled by the average person. During the autumn mating period the bull elk delivers a loud piercing vocal challenge resembling a high-pitched whistle ending in a grunt. This eerie signal is readily distinguished from other sounds of the woods and is not easily forgotten. The cow elk may be heard to utter a coughing grunt.



CARIBOU

Description:

The body color of the caribou is generally dark brown with a white posterior. The male has a white mane on the neck. A white band encircles the leg just above each foot. Seasonal color variations occur with animals becoming greyish in winter. The hooves are large and ungainly looking. The antlers are partly flattened in shape but erect and spreading. They occur on both male and female caribou though those on the female are smaller. Characteristic are the antler brow tines which grow forward over the forehead; often only one develops and looks like an extra frontal antler. The caribou is normally larger than deer but smaller than moose.

Range:

Alberta caribou are of two types: woodland caribou and barren-ground caribou. Both types inhabit limited areas of the Province. The woodland caribou inhabits the region of the upper Athabasca Drainage System. It is also present in the Caribou Hills near the northern boundary of Alberta. Barren-ground caribou come into Alberta from the Northwest Territories during their winter migration southward.

Food:

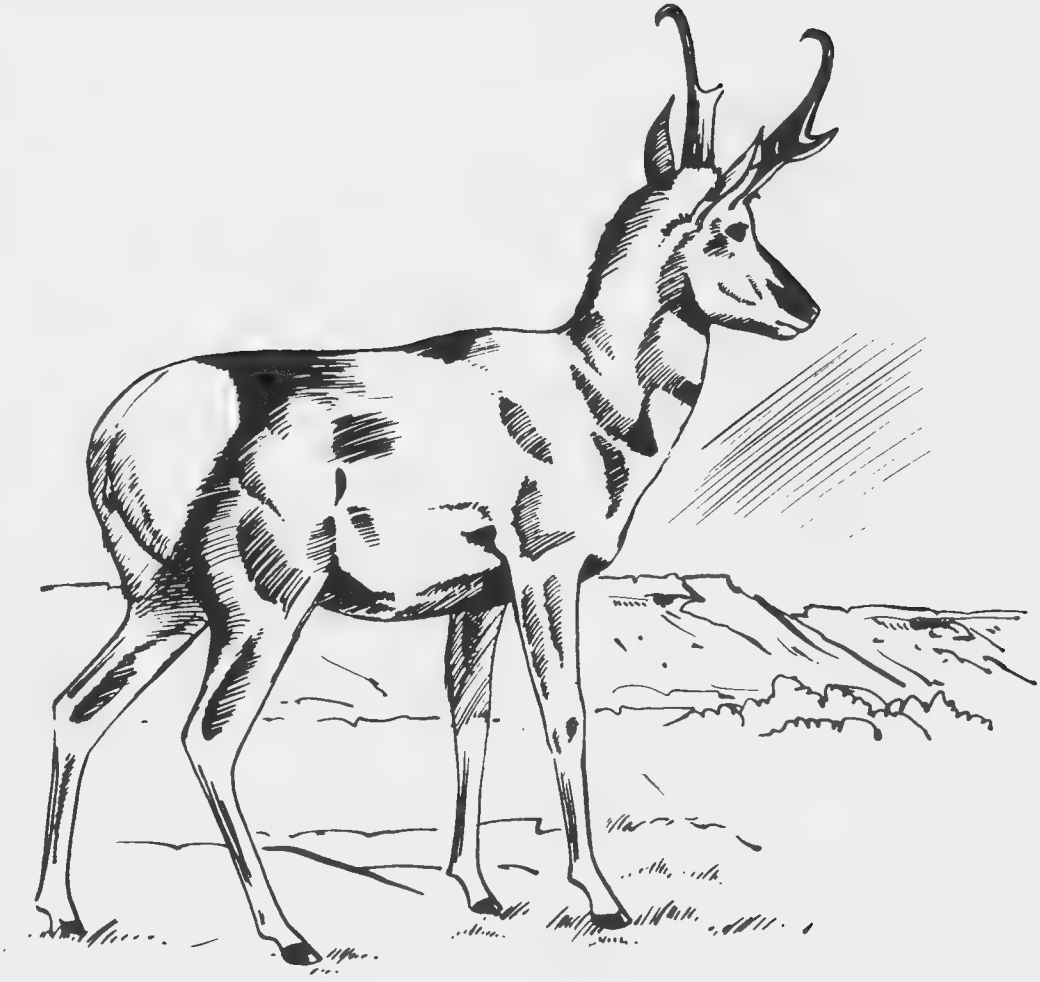
The food of caribou is composed of browse, sedges and lichens.

Reproduction:

The caribou mate in autumn and fawns are born in June, usually single births only.

Special Distinguishing Features:

The caribou normally carries its head lower than other members of the deer family. A distinctive clicking sound occurs during walking that is caused by the action of a tendon sliding over a bone in the foot. When large herds of caribou are migrating this singular sound is most apparent. The large square-shaped muzzle of the caribou gives its face a cow-like appearance. The caribou is at home in the water and does not hesitate to swim long distances.



ANTELOPE

Description:

The antelope is usually smaller than mule deer and is colored golden to russet tan with lighter patches on the lower sides of the body and the sides of the head. The rump has a distinct white patch and two white bands occur on the underside of the neck. A dark mask-like patch shows on the face. Horns appear on both sexes with those on the male growing larger. The horns are erect, curving back at the tips; from about midway along each a prong projects forward - hence the name "Pronghorn". The horn sheath is shed each year; the bony core is permanent.

Range:

Antelope range the treeless grassy plains of southeastern Alberta.

Food:

Antelope food is primarily browse with some herbs and a limited amount of grasses. Sagebrush is a basic item in the diet.

Reproduction:

Breeding takes place in autumn with "bucks" collecting "harems" of "does". Fawning occurs in the spring, normally twins.

Special Distinguishing Features:

When antelope are disturbed, and run, the white rump patch appears to flash like a signal. Their gait is a bouncy run that may develop into a gallop of considerable speed. Antelope live in herds or flocks during most of the year. They are intensely curious and may be lured to close range by any unusual action of man.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN BIGHORN SHEEP

Description:

The overall color of a bighorn sheep is greyish brown with a brown tail set in a white rump patch and a white belly. The sheep is about the same size as deer but presents a more compact appearance. Both sexes have horns; these are initially slender curved grey spikes that sweep back from the head. The development of the ewe's horns is restricted but the male or ram grows massive spirals expanding both in breadth and length. The spirals curl downward, forward and upward flanking the head. Horns are retained throughout the life of the animal.

Range:

The range of the bighorn sheep is limited to the Rocky Mountains and they appear to prefer the alpine meadows and precipitous areas above "tree-line". They may wander to the valleys during winter, and again at any time of the year in search of salt and water.

Food:

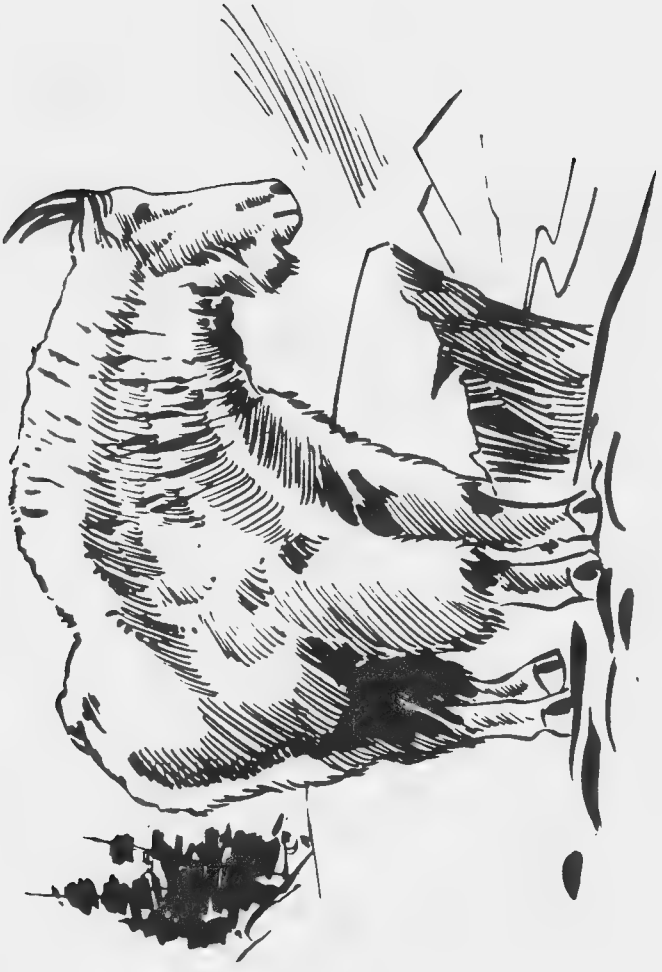
The food of sheep is composed of grasses, herbs, twigs and leaves.

Reproduction:

Mating takes place in autumn and lambing occurs in the spring, usually limited to a single birth. The male mountain sheep is polygamous.

Special Distinguishing Features:

The ram normally remains separated from the "ewe band" except during the mating season. However, lambs of the year and even yearling males will remain with the ewes throughout the year. The grey coat of all members if often tattered and unkempt in appearance. Nevertheless, the picture presented by the mature ram poised on a rocky pinnacle is a thoroughly stirring vision.



MOUNTAIN GOAT

Description:

The color of the mountain goat is white; it may be tinged with patches of yellowish white in summer. It's coat is characterized by a covering of long "guard" hair except on the face and lower legs. A notable feature is the beard of long hair on the goat's jaw and chin. The animal presents a high-shouldered silhouette when standing and this is accentuated by a brush of stiff white hair growing along the spinal ridge of the neck and shoulder. Both male and female have short spikey horns that curve back from the head. The horns, hooves and snout are black.

Range:

Mountain goat range in Alberta is limited to the Rocky Mountains, generally above "tree-line".

Food:

The mountain goat eats alpine shrubs, grasses and herbs.

Reproduction:

Mating takes place in late autumn (November); "kids" are born in the spring, usually one or two. There is a tendency toward monogamy in the species.

Special Distinguishing Features:

The mountain goat is a shaggy white animal that lives among the high precipitous ridges of the mountains. It's gait is seldom hurried and it appears to tread with a studied deliberation. The 'goat' is not considered to be gregarious and is not often seen in groups or herds; males in particular are generally alone. Because they normally live in inaccessible areas and because there are not a large number of these animals in Alberta, the mountain goat is rarely sighted by the casual forest traveller.

Drawings by

Glenna Miller

Cover by

Wallace Hutniak

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